

51
Gift of Thos Board Hollis
A P P E A L

TO THE

SERIOUS AND CANDID

PROFESSORS OF CHRISTIANITY,

ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS, VIZ.

I. The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion,	IV. Election and Reprobation,
II. The Power of Man to do the Will of God,	V. The Divinity of CHRIST,
III. Original Sin,	AND VI. Atonement for Sin, by the Death of CHRIST.

BY A LOVER OF THE GOSPEL.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

A concise History of the Rise of those DOCTRINES

A N D

An Account of the Trial of Mr. ELWALL,
For Heresy and Blasphemy, at Stafford Assizes.

*To us there is one God, the FATHER ; and one Mediator, the MAN
CHRIST JESUS* 1 Cor. viii. 6.—1 Tim. ii. 5.

D^t Priestley

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**A Familiar Illustration of certain PASSAGES of Scripture
relating to the Power of Man to do the Will of God ;
Original Sin ; Election and Reprobation ; the Divinity of
Christ ; and Atonement for Sin by the Death of Christ.
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A P P E A L

TO THE

Serious and candid Professors of Christianity.

My Christian Brethren,

PERMIT one who professes obedience to the same Lord, and faith in the precious promises of the same gospel with yourselves, to address himself to you, with all freedom and plainness of speech, on subjects relating to our common salvation. I need not tell you that these subjects are interesting. In reality, nothing else is interesting in comparison with them. For what is this world compared with the future! What is time compared with eternity! Believe me, my Brethren, it is nothing but the deepest concern for the honour of a religion which is the most valuable inheritance of the human race, and which sets us above all the follies and vices, all the weaknesses and troubles of life, by giving us the most solid hope in death, that has induced me to solicit your attention. But I am confident that you will not think it ill bestowed, because it is upon a subject that is near and dear to you, and the consideration of which cannot but please and profit you.

If, by the blessing of God upon our common endeavours to *lead*, and to *be led into all truth*, I shall be so happy as to bring you to entertain the same views of these things with myself, we shall rejoice together; and if, after all that I may be able to advance, you should still think differently from me, I trust you will, at least, be disposed to think with more candour of some of your fellow-christians, who love the gospel, and are zealous for its honour, though you may think them mistaken in their conceptions concerning it. Let me intreat you, therefore, my brethren, to give me a patient and candid hearing. Attend, in the spirit of meekness, to what I shall say from the earnestness of my heart; and exercise the reason which God has given you upon this occasion, which is the noblest on which it can be exercised, and for which you may, therefore, conclude, that it was principally given you.

I. Of the Use of Reason in Matters of Religion. .

BE not backward, or afraid, my brethren, to make use of your reason in matters of religion, or where the scriptures are concerned. They both of them proceed from the same God and father of us all, who is the giver of every good and every perfect gift. They cannot, therefore, be contrary to one another, but must mutually illustrate and enforce each other. Besides, how can we distinguish one scheme of religion from another, so as to give the preference to that which is the most deserving of it, but by the help of our reason and understanding? What would you yourselves say to a Mahometan, whom you would persuade to abandon the imposture of Mahomet, and embrace christianity, but bid him use his reason; and judge, by the help of it, of the manifest difference between the two religions, and the great superiority of your's to his? Does not God himself appeal to the reason of man, when he condescends to ask us, *Whether his ways be not equal?* Ezek. xviii. 29. Does not the apostle exhort us that, *in understanding we be men?* 1 Cor xiv. 20. **A**re we not expressly commanded to *prove all things, and then hold fast that which is good?* 1 Theff. v. 21. Also, when we are commanded to *search the scriptures*, John v. 39. more must be meant than merely *reading* them, or *receiving implicitly*, the interpretations of others. *Searching* must imply an earnest endeavour to find out for ourselves, and to understand the truths contained in the scriptures; and what faculty can we employ for this purpose, but that which is commonly called *reason*, whereby we are capable of thinking, reflecting, comparing, and judging of things?

Distrust, therefore, all those who decry human reason, and who require you to abandon it, wherever religion is concerned. When once they have gained this point with you, they can lead you whether they please, and impose upon you every absurdity which their sinister views may make it expedient for them that you should embrace. A Popish Priest would require nothing more than this, to make you believe the doctrine of transubstantiation, and that a man is infallible; or to persuade you to commit the most flagrant wickedness, as a means of *doing God service*. For the first of these articles they do not fail to urge the words of scripture, which expressly say, concerning the bread that is used in the Lord's supper,

supper, that it is *the body of Christ* ; Matt. xxvi. 6. and there is no possibility of replying to them, but by appealing to reason, as the necessary and proper judge of the sense of scripture. The Papist, therefore, as might well be expected, is forward, on all occasions, to vilify human reason, and to require men to abandon it ; but true Protestants will not part with it. It is by the help of reason, in conjunction with the scriptures, that we guard ourselves against the gross delusions of the Papists, who, after relinquishing reason, have been *made to believe a lie* ; and by the diligent and continued use of the same power, let us endeavour to combat every remaining error, and trace out and reform every corruption of christianity, till we hold the pure *truth as it is in Jesus*, and *and obey it in the love thereof.*

—Do not think that, by recommending the use of reason, I am about to decry the scriptures. My appeal shall be to both, upon every subject on which I address you ; and I think you cannot but see that the plainest and most obvious sense of the scriptures is in favour of those doctrines which are most agreeable to reason. A good man will rejoice to see them thus go hand in hand, mutually illustrating and enforcing one another.

II. *Of the Power of Man to do the Will of God.*

ONE of the subjects with respect to which I earnestly wish that you would attend to the voice of reason and the scriptures, and with respect to which, one mistake will be followed by many others, and mistakes of great consequence, is concerning *the power of man to do the will of God*. It is a favourite opinion with many teachers of religion, that men have *naturally* (or by that constitution and frame which God their maker hath given them) no power at all to do any thing that is good, not even to think a good thought, much less actually to obey any of the commands of God ; so that, if men were left to themselves, they could do nothing but sin, and must be under a necessity of aggravating their condemnation by every thought, word, and action of their lives. But, my brethren, how does this doctrine agree with the scriptures, and particularly with the manner in which the Divine Being constantly expostulates with the sinful sons of men ; as when he says to the Jews, *Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, why will ye die, O House of Israel.* Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

Wash ye, make you clean. Cease to do evil, learn to do well, &c. &c.
&c. Isa. i. 16.

Is it not plain from this, that it depends upon men themselves, whether they will repent and turn to God or not? And how can it depend upon themselves, if they have not naturally, a sufficient power to do it? You cannot think that God would command, and expect obedience, when he had not given power to obey; and much less that he would urge men to provide for their own safety and happiness, when he himself had put an effectual bar in the way of it.

Suppose that any man's children were shut up in a building that was on fire, while he himself was without, and had the key; and that, instead of opening the door, to favour their escape, he should only call out to them to flee out of the place, in order to avoid instant destruction; and that, as the necessary consequence of this, they should all perish in the flames before his eyes; what would you think of such a father? You would want words to express your abhorrence of his cruelty; and yet in this very light do many christian divines represent the conduct of that God whose tender mercies are over all his works, and who has solemnly declared, *that he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his way and live.* Ezek. xxxiii. 11. *yea, who would have all men to be saved.* 1 Tim. ii. 4.

The conduct of our merciful God and Father, is certainly far different from this, and more agreeable to reason and equity. If he designed us to be accountable creatures, and treats us as such, we must have talents given us, which we may either improve, or misimprove. If we be the subjects of his moral government, we must be in a condition either to observe or to break his laws. A power to do the one necessary supposes a power to do the other; and without this power we should not be the proper subjects of religion; as, in that case, it would be in vain to propose to us either rewards for obedience, or punishments for disobedience.

Nor is the supposition of a power in man to do the will of God, any foundation for pride. For we must still say, with the apostle, *What have we that we have not received? and how then can we glory, as if we had not received it?* Every good and every perfect gift comes from God; and, knowing this, the more we receive of his bounty, the more thankful, and the more humble we should be. I shall, certainly, be more solicitous to exert myself in doing the will of God, when I believe

believe that I have a talent to improve, than if I believe that I have no talent intrusted with me at all ; so that I cannot do even so much as the *wicked and slothful servant, who hid his talent in a napkin.*

Some of those persons who believe that all mankind are absolutely incapable of doing any good, are sometimes heard to invite sinners of all kinds to come to Christ, *as they are, and to say, that the viler they are, the more welcome they will be to him ; as if he was, after this, to cleanse them by some miraculous power.* But, my brethren, the invitation of the gospel runs in very different terms. It is *Repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance.* Matt. iii. 8. *Repent, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.* Acts iii. 19. And none are invited to come to Christ, but those who *labour and are heavy laden ; nor can they find rest for their souls, till they have actually learned of him to be meek and lowly in heart.* Matt xi. 28.

What can be more contrary to the maxims above-mentioned, than the whole tenor of that serious expostulation with the children of Israel in the prophet Isaiah, part of which I quoted above ? *Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now (and not before) and let us reason together says the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* Isa. i. 16, &c.

Others, who entertain the same opinion of the utter inability of man to do the will of God, act more consistently with those sentiments, but far more inconsistently with the scriptures, in never preaching to sinners at all ; though to *call sinners to repentance* was the chief end of Christ's coming into the world. Matt. ix. 13.

Whatever represents a state of acceptance with God, as a thing that may be brought about without any efforts of our own, and especially if it may be done in a moment, or in a very short space of time, is sure to be a popular doctrine. Mankind in general care not how little is expected of them, or how little they themselves have to do, in order to get to heaven. But true religion, that alone which affords solid ground of hope towards God, consists in a change of *heart, affections, and habits ; which can only be brought about by serious resolution, and a vigorous and constant exertion of our powers.* Nay, unless a course of virtue be begun, and good

good habits formed early in life, there is very great danger that the *thorns, briars, or bad soil*, will prevent the good seed from ever coming to maturity.

To believe, as the same persons do, that faith and repentance are nothing that we ourselves are capable of, but altogether the miraculous operation of the Spirit of God in us and upon us, supposes that this great and sudden change may as well take place at the *last hour of life*, as at any other; which certainly encourages the most unwarrantable and most dangerous presumption, and is far from having any countenance in the scriptures. The word of God always represents a safe and *happy death* as the consequence of nothing but a good and *well-spent life*. Some, indeed, are said to have been called at the *eleventh hour*, but none at the *twelfth*, when the time for labouring in the vineyard was quite over; and not one of the foolish virgins, who had neglected to provide themselves with oil, was admitted to the marriage-supper.

III. Of Original Sin.

AS a foundation for this strange doctrine, of the utter inability of men to do what God requires of them, a doctrine so injurious both to our Maker and ourselves, it is said that by his first offence our first parent Adam, and all his posterity, lost all power of doing any thing acceptable to God for the future; that he was the representative of all his posterity; so that when he sinned, we all sinned; and, every sin being an offence against an infinite God, we all became, from that moment, liable to an infinite punishment, even the everlasting wrath and curse of our Maker. And they say, that, on this account only, it would have been just in God to have made us all suffer the most exquisite and endless torments in hell, even though we had never sinned in our own persons.

But, my brethren, you find nothing like any part of this in your bibles. For there you read, *the soul that sinneth, it shall die.* Ezek. xviii. 4. And long after the transgression of Adam, and to this very day, God is continually calling upon men to *cease to do evil, and learn to do well*; which certainly supposes that men always have had, and that we now have, a power to do so. It is allowed that we *suffer* by the sin of Adam, as any child may suffer in consequence of the wickedness

edness of his ancestor ; but it is not possible that we should have *sinned* in him. Wherever there is *sin*, there is *guilt* ; that is, something that may be the foundation of *remorse* of conscience ; something that a man may be *sorry for*, and *repent of* ; something that he may wish he had not done ; all which clearly implies, that sin is something that a man has given his *consent* to, and therefore must be convinced of the reasonableness of his being punished for. But how can any man repent of the sin of Adam, or feel any thing like remorse of conscience for it ; when he cannot but know that he never gave his consent to it, and could not possibly have been, in the least degree, *accessary* to it ? Good and bad conduct are, in their own nature, personal, and cannot possibly be transferred from one to another. Whatever some divines pretend, nothing of this kind can be *imputed* in this sense of the word. We may receive harm by means of one person, and benefit by means of another, but no sin of the former, or righteousness of the latter, can be considered as ours, in the eye of an equitable and just God. The contrary is as much the language and the plain meaning of the scriptures throughout, as it is agreeable to the common sense and reason that God has given us.

IV. *Of Election and Reprobation.*

Supposing that all mankind became liable to the everlasting wrath and curse of God for the sin of one man, some divines say, that it was *mercy* in God to save any, though by an *arbitrary decree*, which left all the rest of the human race under an inevitable necessity of perishing. But certainly, my brethren, such *tender mercy* is *cruelly*. All the creatures of God must look up to him as the author of their being, since it was, undoubtedly, in his power to give, or to withhold it, at his pleasure ; and, surely, a good and merciful God would have put a stop to the propagation of such a race of creatures, rather than suffer them to be born in such shocking circumstances ; in which he infallibly foresaw, that the greatest part of them must be exposed to, and even actually suffer remediless destruction. As surely as I derive my being from a just and merciful God, I conclude that the terms on which I came into the world are advantageous to me ; and therefore, that it must be my own fault only, if I have not reason to rejoice in it, and to be thankful for it.

But,

But, indeed, I can hardly think that any man seriously believes, that the greatest part of his fellow-creatures are born into the world under a pre-determined necessity of being for ever miserable. For, in that case, it must appear probable that any children which he himself may be the means of bringing into the world will be for ever miserable ; and surely no man of real goodness or compassion would wish to have children, or be accessory to their being born in such circumstances.

If this doctrine be true, what motive can any man have to endeavour to *flee from the wrath to come*. Matt. iii. 7. when, if it is to be his lot at all, nothing that he can do will enable him to escape it ; or what motive can a man have to exert himself to *lay hold on eternal life*, 1. Tim. vi. 12. when, if he is to enjoy it at all, he cannot possibly miss of it, or of any thing belonging to it, or that is necessary to prepare him for it ? What reason had the apostle Paul to exhort Christians to *take heed lest they should fall*, 1. Cor. x. 12. when none that ever did stand could possibly fall ? and what reason had he to *labour, lest after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away*, 1. Cor. ix. 27. when being certain of his conversion, he must have known that that consequence was impossible ?

This doctrine, of absolute election and reprobation, is certainly a doctrine of *licentiousness*, and not a *doctrine according to godliness* ; and let divines employ all the ingenuity they are masters of, it is impossible for them to clear this opinion from being the cause of fatal despair in some, and as fatal a security in others. If this opinion were true, and men were really aware of their situation, I should think it impossible to prevent their falling into absolute distraction, through terror and anxiety. It would be like a man having his *all, his life*, nay infinitely more than his life, depending upon the cast of a die ; the decree of God being a thing that he has as little power to command. Besides, this doctrine certainly represents the God and Father of us all in such a light, as no man would chuse that he himself should appear in.

V. Of the Divinity of Christ.

SO fatal have the consequences of the sin of Adam been represented, that you have been told that nothing but the blood of God himself could reverse them ; and therefore

you

you have been taught to believe, that Jesus Christ, whose proper title is *the son of man*, as well as *the son of God*, was not merely *man*, but *very and eternal God* himself ; without considering that, by thus making more Gods than one, you are guilty of a breach of the first and most important of all the commandments, which says expressly, *Thou sha't have no other Gods before me.* Exod. xx. 3. But whatever such divines may say, the apostle Paul says, in direct contradiction to them, that *To us there is but one God, the FATHER, of whom are all things ; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him,* 1 Cor. viii. 6. And again, after saying that we have *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*, he adds, *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all,* Eph. iv. 5, 6. The creed of all christians, therefore, ought to be, *There is ONE GOD, and one mediator between God and men, the MAN Christ Jesus,* 1 Tim. ii. 5.

The *Father* is frequently styled *God*, even with respect to Christ, as well as other beings. *The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give unto you, that ye may know the exceeding greatness of his power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, &c.* Eph. i. 17, &c. Christ himself uses the same language, *I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and unto my God, and your God,* John xx. 17. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?* Matt. xxvii. 26.

Christ who was *the image of the invisible God*, and the *first-born* (or *most excellent*) of all his creatures, Col. i. 15. and in whom dwelt *all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*, Col. ii. 9. acknowledged that *his Father was greater than he*, John xiv. 28. and, indeed, upon all occasions, and in the clearest terms, he expressed his dependence upon God his father, for all *his power and glory* ; as if he had purposely intended to guard his disciples against forming too high an opinion of the dignity of their master. *Verily I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself,* John v. 19. *I can of mine own self do nothing.* As I hear I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father who sent me, v. 30. The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father who dwelleth in me, he doth the works. xiv. 10. I live by the Father, vi. 57. The Father hath given to the son to have *life in himself* ; and hath given him authority to execute judgment, v. 26, 27. All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth. Matt. xxviii. 18. He even calls his Father the

the only true God, John xvii. 3. that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. It appears to me not to be in the power of language to exclude the idea of the divinity of Christ more expressly than by these solemn words.

Notwithstanding the divine communications with which our Lord was favoured, some things are expressly said to be withheld from him. For he himself, speaking of his second coming, says, Mark xiii. 32. *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.* In Matthew xxiv. 36. where the same observation is repeated, it is, *but my Father only.*

The apostles, notwithstanding their attachment to their Lord and master, always preserve the idea of his subordination to the Father, and consider all his honour and power as derived from him. *He received from God the Father, honour and glory, 2 Pet. i. 17. It pleased the Father, that in him should all fullness dwell. Col. i. 19. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, Rev. i. 1. Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's, 1 Cor. iii. 23. The head of Christ is God. 1 Cor. xi. 3.*

The reason why Christ was so much distinguished by God the Father, is frequently and fully expressed in the scriptures, viz. his obedience to the will of God, and especially in his submitting to die for the benefit of mankind. *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life. John x. 17. He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, Phil. ii. 8—11. Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now sat down at the right hand of God, Heb. xii. 2.*

Our Lord says, that he and his Father are one, John x. 30. but he sufficiently explains himself, when he prayeth that all his disciples may be one with him, and his Father, even as they are one, John xvii. 11. and he gives them the same glory which God had given to him, ver. 22. Besides, at the very time that our Lord says, that he and his Father are one, and in the very sentence preceding it, ver. 29. he says, that his Father is greater than all. But how could the Father be greater than all, if there was any other, who was so much one with him, as to be, in all respects, equal to him?

The mere term *God* is, indeed, sometimes used in a lower and inferior sense in the scriptures, denoting *dominion* only; as when the Divine Being himself says, that *he will make Moses a god to Pharaoh*, Exod. vii. 1. but, surely, there can be no danger of our mistaking the sense of such phrases as these; or if it were possible, our Lord himself has sufficiently guarded against any misconstruction of them when applied to himself, by the explanation he has given of them; informing us, that, if, in the language of scripture, *they are called gods to whom the word of God came*, John x. 35. (though, in fact, they were no other than mere men) he could not be guilty of blasphemy in calling himself only *the Son of God*. Now if Christ had been conscious to himself that he was the *true and very God*, and that it was of the utmost consequence to mankind that they should regard him in that light, this was certainly a proper time for him to have declared himself, and not to have put his hearers off with such an apology as this.

But even this power and dominion, to which Christ is advanced by God his Father, *who gave all power into his hands*, and who *made him head over all things to his church*, Eph. i. 22. this mediatorial kingdom of Christ (as it is sometimes, and with sufficient propriety, termed) is not to be perpetual. For the apostle Paul, speaking, no doubt, under immediate inspiration, expressly says, that when *the end shall come*, that *God shall have subdued all things to his Son* (in which he observes, that he *must be excepted who did subdue all things unto him*) *he must deliver up the kingdom to God, even the FATHER, and be himself subject to him who had put all things under him, that God may be all in all.* 1 Cor. xv. 24, &c. Nay, he himself says expressly, that he had not the disposal of the highest offices of his kingdom, Matt. xx. 23. *To sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.*

So clear, my brethren, so full, and so express, is the uniform testimony of the scriptures to the great doctrine of the proper unity of *God*, and of the subordination of Christ, and all other beings to him, that the prevalence of so impious a doctrine, as the contrary must be, can be ascribed to nothing but to that *mystery of iniquity*, which, though it began to work in the times of the apostles themselves, was not then risen to so enormous a height as to attack the supremacy of the *one living and true God*, and *give his peculiar glory to another*. This, my brethren, among other shocking corruptions of

genuine christianity, grew up with the system of popery ; and to shew that nothing is impossible to the superstition and credulity of men, when they are *become vain in their imaginations*, after exalting a man into a god, a creature into a creator, they made a piece of bread into one also, and then bowed down to, and worshipped, the work of their own hands.

But though it seemed fit to the unsearchable wisdom of God, that all the errors and abuses of popery should not be reformed at once ; and though this great error was left untouched by the first reformers, blessed be God the bible is as open to us as it was to them ; and by the exertion of the same judgment and spirit, we may free christianity from the corruptious which they left adhering to it ; and then, among other excellencies of our religion, *Our Lord will be one and his name one.* Zech. xiv. 9.

If you ask *who*, then, is Jesus Christ, if he be not God ; I answer, in the words of Peter, addressed to the Jews, after his resurrection and ascension, that *Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved of God, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him*, Acts ii. 22. If you ask what is meant by *man*, in this place ; I answer, that *man*, if the word be used with any kind of propriety, must mean the same kind of being with yourselves. I say, moreover, with the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, that *it became him by whom are all things, and for whom are all things, to make this great captain of our salvation in all respects, like unto us his brethren, that he might be made perfect through sufferings*, Heb. ii. 10. 17. and *that he might have a feeling of all our infirmities*, iv. 13. For this reason it was that our Saviour and deliverer was not made of the nature of an *angel*, or like any super-angelic being, but was of the *seed of Abraham*. ii. 16. that is (exclusive of the divinity of the Father, which resided in him, and acted by him) a mere *man*, as other Jews, and as we ourselves also are.

Christ being made by the immediate hand of God, and not born in the usual course of generation, is no reason for his not being considered as a man. For then Adam must not have been a man. But in the ideas of Paul, both the *first and second Adam* (as Christ, on this account, is sometimes called) were equally men : *By man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead*, 1 Cor. xv. 21. And, certainly, in the resurrection of a *man*, that is, of a person in all respects like ourselves, we have a *more lively hope* of our own

own resurrection: that of Christ being both a *proof* and a *pattern* of ours. We can, therefore, more firmly believe, that *because he lives, we* who are the same that he was, and who shall undergo the same change by death that he did, *shall live also.* John xiv. 19.

Till this great corruption of Christianity be removed, it will be in vain to preach the gospel to Jews, or Mahometans, or, indeed, to any people who retain the use of the reason and understanding that God has given them. For how is it possible that *three* persons, *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, should be separately, each of them, possessed of all divine perfections, so as to be *true, very, and eternal God*, and yet that there should be but *one God*; a truth which is so clearly and fully revealed, that it is not possible for men to refuse their assent to it; or else it would, no doubt, have been long ago expunged from our creed, as utterly irreconcileable with the more favourite doctrine of a *Trinity*, a term which is not to be found in the scriptures. Things *above* our reason may, for any thing that we know to the contrary, be *true*; but things expressly *contrary* to our reason, as that *three* should be *one*, and *one three*, can never appear to us to be *so*.

With the Jews, the doctrine of the Divine Unity is, and indeed justly, considered as the most fundamental principle of all religion. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord,* Deut. vi. 4. *Mark xii. 29.* To preach the doctrine of the Trinity to the Jews, can appear to them in no other light, than an attempt to seduce them into *idolatry*, a thing which they dare not entertain the most distant thought of.

The great creed of the Mahometans is, that *There is one God, and Mahomet is his prophet.* Now that Mahomet is not the prophet of God, it is to be hoped, they may, in time, be made to believe; but we must not expect that they will so easily give up their faith in the unity of God. To make the gospel what it was originally, *glad tidings of great joy*; and as at last it certainly will be to all the nations of the world, we must free it from this most absurd and impious doctrine, and also from many other corruptions which have been introduced into it. It can no otherwise appear worthy of God, and favourable to the virtue and happiness of mankind.

lest some common objections should hinder the reception of the great truth here contended for, I shall briefly consider

sider and reply to the principal of them. It is often said that Christ speaks of his *humanity* only, whenever he represents himself as inferior to the father, and dependent upon him. But the scriptures themselves are far from furnishing the least hint of any such method of interpretation, though, according to the Trinitarians, it is absolutely necessary to the true understanding of them.

Besides, when it is applied to the passages in question, it is far from making them either true in themselves, or agreeable to the obvious purport and design of the places in which they are introduced. I shall just mention a few. Could our Lord say with truth, and without an unworthy prevarication, that *the Father is the only true God*, John xvii. 3. if any other person, not implied in the term *Father*, was as much the true God as himself? Now the term *Father* being appropriated to what is called the *first* person in the godhead, cannot comprehend the *Son*, who is called the *second*. This key, therefore, is of no service in this case, and our Lord, by expressing himself as he has done, could not but lead his hearers into what is called a dangerous mistake.

When our Lord said that *his Father was greater than he*, did he make any reserve, and secretly mean, not *his whole self*, but *only part*, and the inferior part of himself, the other part being equal in power and glory with the Father? How mean the prevarication, and how unworthy of our Lord!

When our Lord said that *the time of the day of judgment was not known to himself, the Son, but to the father only*, could he mean that his *humanity* only did not know it, but that his *divinity* (which is supposed to be intimately united with his *humanity*) was as well acquainted with it as the *Father* himself? If the human nature of Christ had been incapable of having that knowledge communicated to it, the declaration would have been needless: but as that was not the case, his hearers must necessarily understand him as speaking of himself in his highest capacity; as he certainly must do, if at all, when he speaks of himself as the *Son*, corresponding to the *Father*.

If Christ had not satisfied the Jews that he did not mean to make himself equal with God, would they not have produced it against him at his trial, when he was condemned as a blasphemer, because he confessed that he was the Christ only: and yet no Jew expected any thing more than a man for their Messiah,

Messiah, and our Saviour no where intimates that they were mistaken in that expectation. It is plain that Martha considered our Lord as a different person from God, and dependent upon God, when she said to him, John xi. 22. *I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.*

VI. Of ATONEMENT for Sin by the Death of Christ.

YOU have been taught by Divines, that if Christ be not God, he could not have made an *infinite satisfaction* for the sins of mankind. But, my brethren, where do you learn that the pardon of sin, in a finite creature, requires an infinite satisfaction; or, indeed, any satisfaction at all, besides repentance and reformation, on the part of a sinner. We read in the scriptures that we are *justified freely by the grace of God*, Rom. iii. 34. but what free grace, or mercy, does there appear to have been in God, if Christ gave a full price for our justification, and bore the infinite weight of divine wrath on our account. We are commanded to *forgive others, as we ourselves hope to be forgiven*, Matt. vii. 14. and to be *merciful, as our Father, who is in heaven, is merciful*. But surely we are not thereby authorized to insist upon any atonement, or satisfaction, before we give up our resentment towards an offending and penitent brother. Indeed, how could it deserve the name of *forgiveness* if we did? If he only *repent*, we are commanded to *forgive him*. Luke xvii. 4.

You read in the scriptures that Christ died a *sacrifice for our sins*. Heb. ix. 26. So he did, and a sacrifice it was, of a *sweet smelling favour to God*. To die, as Christ did, in the glorious cause of truth and virtue; to die, as he did, in order to show us an example of patiently suffering death for our religion, and the good of mankind, and in a firm hope of a resurrection to a future and eternal life; to die, as he did, in express attestation of his own divine mission, by his manifest resurrection from the dead, and as the fullest proof of that doctrine, by means of which sinners are continually reconciled unto God, was a noble sacrifice indeed. We also are commanded to *yield our bodies living sacrifice*. Rom. xii. 1. And we are required to offer the *sacrifices of praise continually*. Psal. cxvi. 17. But it is plain

that all these are only figurative expressions, and used by way of comparison. Neither our *bodies*, nor our *prayers* can be considered as *real sacrifices*; nor, are we, therefore, obliged to suppose that Christ was a *real sacrifice*. And though we, like him, should be called actually to *lay down our lives for our brethren*, 1 John iii. 16. which, in imitation of him, we are enjoined to be ready to do, we should be *sacrifices* only in the figurative sense of the word.

It is true, that no man who is a sinner (and all men have sinned) can be *justified by his works*. We all stand in need of, and must have recourse to, *free grace and mercy*; but it is a great dishonour to God to suppose that this mercy and grace takes its rise from any thing but his own essential goodness; and that he is not *of himself*, and independent of all foreign considerations whatever, what he solemnly declared himself to Moses, at the time of the giving of the law to be, namely, *a God merciful and gracious, long suffering, abundant in goodness and in truth*. Exod. xxxiv. 6. or that he requires any other sacrifices, than the *sacrifices of a broken spirit, and a contrite heart, which he will never despise*. Ps. li. 17.

Can we wish for a more distinct, and perfect representation of the manner in which God forgives the sins of his offspring of mankind, than our saviour has exhibited to us in that most excellent parable of the *prodigal son*; in which the good father no sooner sees his child, who had abandoned him, and wasted his substance in riotous living, returning to him and to his duty; but without waiting for any atonement or propitiation, even while he was yet a great way off, he ran to him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him. Luke xv. 20. The same representation we see in the parable of the creditor, who freely forgave his servant, because he humbly desired him. Let us not then, my brethren, deprive the ever-blessed God of the most glorious and honourable of all his attributes, and leave him nothing but *justice*, or rather *vengeance*, which is expressly said to be *his strange work*. Isaiah xxviii. 21.

It is impossible to reconcile the doctrine of the satisfaction for sin by the death of Christ, with the doctrine of *free grace*, which, according to the uniform tenor of the scriptures, is so fully displayed in the pardon of sin, and the *justification of sinners*. When, therefore, the apostle Paul says, Rom. iii. 24. *That we are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*, the meaning of the latter clause must be interpreted in such a manner as to make

it consistent with the former ; and it is far from requiring any force or straining of the text to do it. ~ For it is only necessary to suppose that our *redemption* (or, as the word properly signifies, and is indeed frequently rendered by our translators, our *deliverance*) from the power of sin, *i. e.* our *repentance and reformation*, without which there is no promise of pardon, is effected by the gospel of Jesus Christ, who came to *call sinners to repentance* ; but still God is to be considered as the *giver*, and not the *receiver* with respect to our *redemption*, for we read that *he spared not his own son, but gave him up for us all.* Rom. viii. 32.

To say that God the Father provided an atonement for his own offended justice is, in fact, to give up the doctrine. If a person owe me a sum of money, and I chuse to have the debt discharged, is it not the same thing, whether I remit the debt at once, or supply another person with money wherewith to pay me in the debtor's name ? If satisfaction be made to any purpose, it must be in some manner, in which the offender may be a sufferer, and the offended person a gainer ; but it can never be reconciled to equity, or answer any good purpose whatever, to make the innocent suffer the punishment of the guilty. If, as Abraham says, it be far from God to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked, Gen. xviii. 25. much farther must it be from him to slay the righteous instead of the wicked.

I wish the zealous advocates for this doctrine would consider, that if it be necessary, in the nature of things, that the justice of God be satisfied before any sin can be pardoned, and Christ be God as well as the Father, whether the justice of Christ ought not to have been satisfied in the first place. If so, what other infinite being has made satisfaction to him ? But if the divine nature of the Son required no satisfaction, why should the divine nature of the Father require any ?

If it had been inconsistent with the divine justice to pardon sin upon repentance only, without some farther satisfaction, we might have expected to have found it *expressly said to be so* in the scriptures ; but no such declaration can be produced either from the Old or the New Testament. All that can be pretended is, that it may be *inferred* from it. Though good works are recommended to us in the strongest manner, it is never with any salvo or caution, as if they were not of themselves acceptable to God. The declarations

of the divine mercy to the penitent are all absolute, without the most distant hint of their having a reference to any consideration on which they are made. *Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive*, Psalm lxxxiv. 5. *To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses*, though we have rebelled against him. Dan. ix. 3. When David and other penitents confess their sins, and intreat for pardon, they refer themselves to the divine mercy only, without seeming to have the least idea of any thing farther. *Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness sake*, O Lord. Psalm xxv. 6.

It is particularly remarkable, that when sacrifices under the law are expressly said not to be sufficient for the pardon of sin, we are never referred to any *more availing sacrifice*; but to good works only. *Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of the Lord are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise*. Psalm li. 16, 17. If any of the Jews had had the least notion of the necessity of any atonement for the sins of mankind, they could not but have expected a *suffering Messiah*; and yet it is plain that the very best of them had no such idea. And though our Saviour frequently explains the reason of his coming, and the necessity of his suffering, it is never on any such account. If he had done it any where, it might have been expected in those discourses by which he endeavoured to reconcile his disciples to his death, in his solemn prayer before his sufferings, at the time of his agony in the garden, or when he was upon the cross; yet nothing of this kind drops from him on any of these occasions.

When our Lord describes the proceedings of the day of judgment, he doth not represent the righteous as referring themselves to the sufferings or merit of their judge for their justification; and the judge himself expressly grounds it on their good works only. Though Peter, in his discourse to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, speaks of their sin in murdering Christ as of a heinous nature, he says not a word of the necessity of any atonement, or that an ample satisfaction had just been made, by means of their very wickedness. How would a modern divine have harangued upon the occasion, and what advantage might he have taken of the cry of the Jews, *His blood be upon us, and upon our children.*

children. But Peter only exhorts to repentance, and speaks of the death of Christ as an event that took place according to the fore-knowledge of God.

All the discourses of Paul upon various occasions in the book of Acts, are entirely moral. In his celebrated speech at Athens, he only urges his hearers to repentance, from the consideration of a future judgment. He says not a word of what is now called the true gospel of Jesus Christ. In short, it is only from the literal interpretation of a few figurative expressions in the scriptures that this doctrine of *atonement*, as well as that of *transubstantiation* has been derived; and it is certainly a doctrine highly injurious to God; and if we, who are commanded to imitate God, should act upon the maxims of it, it would be subversive of the most amiable part of virtue in men. We should be implacable and unmerciful, insisting upon the uttermost farthing.

These, my brethren, are the principal heads on which I proposed to expostulate with you, in the plain and free manner in which I have done. Do you yourselves, search the scriptures and see whether these things be so. Pray to the God of truth to lead you into all truth, and may he give you understanding in all things.

VII. Practical Consequences of the above Doctrines.

THE sound knowledge of christianity is not of importance as a matter of *speculation* merely; though abstract truths, especially truths that relate to God, and the maxims of his moral government, are not without their utility and obligation; but the truths that I here contend for nearly affect the sentiments of our hearts, and our conduct in life; as, indeed, has been shewn in many respects already. Considering God as possessed of the character in which some divines represent him, it is impossible, while human nature is what it is, that he should appear in an amiable or respectable light. Such a God may, indeed, be the object of *dread* and *terror* to his creatures; but by no means of their *love* or *reverence*. And what is obedience without love? It cannot be that of the *heart*, which, however, is the only thing that is of any real value in religion. Also, how can a man love his fellow-creatures in general, when he considers the greatest part of them as the objects of the divine abhorrence, and doomed by him to an everlasting destruction, in which

which he believes that he himself must for ever rejoice? And what can remain of virtue, when these two great sources of it, the *love of God and of mankind*, are thus grossly corrupted? Lastly, how must the genuine spirit of *mercy* and *forgiveness*, which so eminently distinguishes the gospel of Christ, be debased, when God himself (whose conduct in this very respect is particularly proposed to our imitation) is considered as never forgiving sin without some previous atonement, satisfaction, or intercession.

On the other hand, loving God, as the compassionate Father of all his offspring, as willing that *all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of his truth*; and also loving all mankind as our brethren, as, together with ourselves, the children of the same gracious Father, we cannot want the most generous and powerful motives to *do the will of God, and to provoke one another to love and to good works*; being in no fear of counteracting the secret designs of the Almighty, which we believe are aimed, not at the destruction, but the happiness of all his creatures.

Think not, however, that I am so uncharitable as to suppose that all those who profess to maintain the doctrines I have been arguing against, are universally destitute of the genuine love of God, or of their fellow-creatures. I am sensible, and truly thankful, that it is not always the consequence; but it is because the hearts of such persons are really influenced by better principles than those which they avow. They by no means habitually regard the Divine Being in the light in which their principles represent him, but as the *true Father* of all the creatures that he has made, and, as such, sincerely desirous to promote their best interests.

Also, notwithstanding, if they be asked, they will not hesitate to say, that Christ is God, the supremacy of the Father, even with respect to the Son, is, at the same time, the real sentiment of their minds; and when they lift up their hearts to God, it is only *God the Father* that is the proper object of their adoration. The constant tenor of the scriptures is so contrary to their professed creed, that though they dare not call it in question, it is not able to counteract the plainer, the more consistent, and the better principles which will force themselves upon their minds from conversing with the bible.

Besides, it requires more subtilty and refinement to enter into the principles above-mentioned, than the common people

ple are masters of.' They cannot conceive how one man should sin, and another person, six thousand years after, be guilty of that sin, and punishable for it ; how one person's righteousness should be considered as the righteousness of another ; or that three distinct persons should each of them be God, and yet that there should be no more Gods than one.

Men of plain understandings, in fact, never do believe any such thing ; nor can it be supposed that the gospel, which was intended to be the solid foundation of the faith, hope, and joy of common people, should require so much acuteness, as is necessary to give even a plausible colour to these strange assertions. The attempt to explain them (and, till they be explained, they can no more be believed than a proposition in an unknown tongue) can lead to nothing but endless and unprofitable controversy. It is happy, therefore, that so many persons make a better use of the gospel than their tenets would lead them to do, and that they consider it chiefly as a *rule of life*, and the *foundation of hope after death*. But, as far as the principles I have been arguing against are believed, they cannot but do harm to those who entertain them, as well as bring disgrace upon the christian name ; both which every *lover of the gospel* should endeavour to prevent.

A concise History of the above-mentioned Doctrines.

I. A concise History of Opinions concerning Jesus Christ.

YOU will say, if Christ be not really God, but merely a man, though inspired and assisted by God, how came the christian world to fall into so great an error ? In return, I might ask, how, if Christ be truly God, equal to the Father, so many christians, and especially the Jewish christians, and many others in the very early ages of the christian church, came to think him to be merely a man ; when it may be easily conceived that, on many accounts, christians, who were continually reproached with the meanness of their master, would be disposed to *add to*, rather than to *take from* his dignity ? But it is not difficult to shew by what means, and by what steps, christians came to think as the generality of them now do.

It

It was the universal opinion of philosophers, at the time of the promulgation of christianity, that the souls of all men had existed before they were sent to animate the bodies that were provided for them here, and also that all souls were *emanations*, or *parts detached* from the deity. For at that time there was no idea of any substance being properly *immaterial*, and *indivisible*. When these philosophers became christians, and yet were ashamed of being the disciples of a man who had been crucified, they naturally gave a distinguished rank to the soul of Christ before he came into the world. They even went one step farther, and maintained that Christ had a body in appearance only, and not in reality, and therefore that he suffered nothing at all when he was scourged and crucified.

This opinion the apostle John reprobates with great severity, and even calls it *Antichristian*, 1 John iv. 3. whereas though it is acknowledged that the other opinion, viz. that of Christ being *merely a man*, existed in the times of the apostles, it is remarkable that this apostle takes no notice of it. It was plainly the doctrine of those only who maintained that Christ was not truly a man that gave this apostle any disturbance, or he would never have said as he does, 1 John iv. 2. *Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh* (that is, was truly a man) *is of God*.

After this, philosophizing christians began to add to the pre-existent dignity of Christ in another way, and at length, carried it much higher than those upon whom this apostle animadverted with so much severity. They said that Christ was originally *in God*, being his *reason*, or *logos*, which came *out of him*, and was *personified* before the creation of the world, in which he was the immediate agent, and that this new personage was henceforth the medium of all the divine communications to mankind, having been the person who spake to Adam in paradise, to Noah, to Abraham, and all the patriarchs, who delivered the law from mount Sinai, and lastly inhabited the body of Jesus of Nazareth.

On this principle they explained many passages in the Old Testament, in which the *word of God* is spoken of, as that of the psalmist, *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made*, &c. making this *word* to be a *person*, distinct from God, whose *word* it was; whereas nothing can be more plain, than that by the *word of God* in this place, is meant the

the power of God, exerted with as much ease as men utter words.

These philosophizing christians took great pains to explain how the *reason*, or *wisdom* of God could thus become a person, distinct from God, and yet God continue a reasonable being; but their account of it is too trifling to be recited in this place. However, it was far from being pretended, in general, that the doctrine of the divinity of Christ was such a mystery as could not be explained. For by *mystery* they only meant something of a solemn nature, which was unknown till it was revealed or explained. And indeed this is plainly the use of the word *mystery* in the New Testament; and it was also the usual meaning of the word when the present translation of the bible was made; the *mysteries* of any particular trade being the *secrets* of that trade, which yet every master taught his apprentices.

In this state the doctrine continued till after the council of Nice, in the year of our Lord, 325; but in all this time a real superiority was always acknowledged in the Father, as the only source of divinity; and it was even explicitly acknowledged that there was a time when the son of God had no separate existence, being only the *reason of God*, just as the *reason of man* is a part, or a property of man. One of the most eminent of the christian Fathers says, “There was a time when God was neither a Father, nor a Judge; “ for he could not be a Father before he had a son, nor a “ judge before there was sin.”

So far were they from supposing the son of God to be *equal to the Father*, that when they were charged, as they frequently were, with making *two Gods*, they generally replied, that the son was only *God of God*, as having proceeded from a superior God, which is the language of the Nicene creed; whereas the Father was *God of himself* (αὐτὸς) by which they meant *undervived*, which they held to be the prerogative of the Father only.

In all this time the Jewish christians, who were not tainted with the heathen philosophy, maintained the doctrine of the proper and simple humanity of Christ. Athanasius himself was so far from being able to deny this, that he says all the Jews were so fully persuaded that their Messiah was to be a man like themselves, that the apostles were obliged to use great caution in divulging the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. He says, that the reason why Peter, Acts ii. 22.

only calls him *a man approved of God*, and why, on other occasions in the course of that book, and other parts of the New Testament, he is simply called *a man*, was, that at first the apostles did not think proper to do more than prove that Jesus was the *Christ*, or *Messiah*, and that they thought it prudent to divulge the doctrine of the divinity of Christ by degrees. He likewise says, that the Jews of those times, meaning the Jewish christians, being in this error themselves drew the Gentiles into it. Athanasius greatly commends the apostles for this address in their circumstances. But what the apostles scrupled to teach, we should be scrupulous in believing. Chrysostom gives the same account of the situation of the apostles with respect to the Jews.

It also clearly appears from ecclesiastical history, that the unlearned among the christians were exceedingly averse to the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, even in the qualified sense above-mentioned, opposing what they called the supreme *monarchy* of the Father, to the novel doctrine of the divinity of the Son; and the philosophizing christians were obliged to make laboured apologies to these early unitarians, acknowledging the perfect inferiority of the Son to the Father. But at length these unitarians, who are expressly said to have been the majority of christians in the third century, were overborne by the superior influence and popularity of their adversaries, who, from believing Christ to be God in an inferior and qualified sense of the word, came, in the natural course of things, to believe him to be God equal to the Father himself, and to have existed from all eternity independently of him. But it was several centuries before this doctrine was fully established. And the holy spirit was generally considered either as the same thing with the *power of God*, that is God himself (just as the *spirit of a man* is a man) or else a superangelic being, inferior both to the Father and the Son, till after the council of Nice.

In the mean time, Arius and his followers, shocked at the doctrine of Christ being of the *same substance* with the Father, maintained that, though he had pre-existed, and had been the medium of all the dispensations of God to mankind, he was, like all other derived beings, *created out of nothing*; the opinion of all souls having been emanations from the supreme mind being then generally denied by christians.

Thus did it please God, for reasons unknown to us, to permit the rise and general spread of the trinitarian and

Arian opinions, as he permitted the rise and amazing power of the *man of sin*, and many corruptions and abuses of christianity utterly subversive of the genuine purity of the gospel, till the full time for the reformation of this and other gross corruptions of christianity was come.

II. *A concise History of the Doctrines of Grace, Original Sin, and Predestination.*

IT was a controversy about the nature and use of baptism that occasioned the starting of the doctrine of the *natural impotence of man to do what God requires of him*, of the imputation of the *sin of Adam* to all his posterity, and of the arbitrary *predestination* of certain individuals of the human race to everlasting life, while the rest of mankind were left in a state of *reprobation*; and this was so late as four hundred years after Christ. Before that time it had been the universal opinion of christians, and of Austin himself, who first advanced the doctrines above-mentioned, that every man has the power of obeying or disobeying the laws of God, that all men may be saved if they will, and that no decrees of God will be the least obstruction in the way of any man's salvation.

But Pelagius, a man of good understanding, and exemplary morals, in his declamations against some abuses of baptism, asserting, that baptism itself does not wash away sin, as was then generally supposed (on which account it was the custom with many to defer it till near death) nor could have been appointed for that purpose, because infants, which have no sin, are baptised; Austin, in opposition to him, maintained that, though infants have no *actual sin* of their own, they have the stain of *original sin* in which they were born; though he was far from asserting that Adam was the *federal head* of all his posterity, and that his sin was properly *imputed* to them. This was an improvement upon the doctrine in after ages. What Austin maintained was, that men derive a *corrupt nature*, or a *proneness to sin*, from Adam.

Also, having been led, in the course of this controversy, to assert, that by means of original sin no man had it in his power to attain to salvation, he was obliged to maintain that it depended upon the *will of God* only who should be finally saved, and that he *predestinated* whom he thought proper for that purpose, independent of any foresight of

their good works, which it was not in their power to perform without his immediate assistance, and in which he must be the first mover.

But notwithstanding this doctrine of the corruption of human nature, the necessity of divine grace for the production of every good thought or action, and the predestination to eternal life without regard to good works, advanced by Austin, prevailed in the west, chiefly through the authority of his name; it was never received in the eastern church, and was much controverted, and held with various modifications, in the western. Also, together with this doctrine of grace, the divines of the Roman Catholic church held the doctrine of *human merit*, founded on the right use of the grace of God to man. And the present doctrines of *grace*, *original sin*, and *predestination*, were never maintained in their full extent till after the reformation by Luther, who was a friar of the order of Austin, had been much attached to his doctrines, and made great use of them in opposing the popish doctrines of *indulgence*, founded on that of *merit*.

III. A concise History of the Doctrine of Atonement.

THE doctrine of atonement, or of the necessity of *satisfaction* being made to the justice of God by the death of Christ, in order to his remitting the sins of men, arose from an abuse of the figurative language of scripture, as the doctrine of *transubstantiation* also did. But for several centuries these figurative expressions were understood and applied in a manner very different from what they now are.

It was granted by some pretty early writers, that we were *bought* (or *redeemed*) *with a price*; but then, as we had been the slaves of *sin*, and were redeemed by God, who ransomed us by the death of his son, it was maintained till after the time of Austin (the principal author of all the rigid doctrines that are now called *Calvinistic*) that the price of our redemption was paid not to God, but by God to the *devil*, in whose power we were. Of this opinion was Austin himself, who wrote largely on the subject in his treatise on the doctrine of the trinity. It was long after his time before we find any traces of its being generally thought that the price of redemption was paid to the offended justice of God; and the present doctrine of atonement, founded on the idea of the absolute necessity of an infinite satisfaction being made by

by one infinite being for offences of an infinite magnitude, as committed against another infinite being, is subsequent to the reformation. This doctrine was advanced by the reformers in the course of their controversy with the papists, about the doctrine of human merit, works of penance, and the power of granting indulgences. Now can it be supposed that a doctrine of so much importance, as this is always represented to be, should have been unknown so many ages?

Thus all these boasted ancient doctrines are in fact of late date, either having arisen from the principles of heathen philosophy, or having been started and extended in the course of controversy, one false position making another necessary for its support; and an air of awful and deep *mystery* has been no small recommendation of them to many of the more ignorant.

The doctrine of the *trinity*, having been one of the earliest corruptions of christianity, will probably be one of the last to be completely eradicated. But the time, I trust, is fast approaching when, by means of the zeal of truly enlightened and good men in this great cause, this fundamental error, which gives such great and just cause of offence to Jews and Mahometans, will be removed, and all that has been built upon it will fall to the ground.

The Conclusion.

MY Christian Brethren, if the reading of this address give rise to any *doubts* or *scruples* in your minds, with respect to some doctrines which you have been used to consider as true and *fundamental* in the christian religion, inquire farther; and if you be *satisfied* that you have hitherto been mistaken, dare to avow the truth, and act consistently with it. Dread the consequences of joining with an enlightened mind, in the *idolatrous worship* of any creature, though enjoined by any human authority; remembering the words of Christ, *Thou shall worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* Matt. iv. 10. and also that awful voice from heaven respecting all antichristian corruptions of the gospel, in mystical Babylon; *Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.* Rev. xviii. 4.

Think not to avail yourselves of the wretched equivocation of many divines, who imagine that they may safely ascribe

all divine honours to Jesus Christ, on account of his *union with the Father*, when they believe no more of his *proper divinity* than professed Arians or Socinians. By this artifice they secure the reputation of orthodoxy; but let them consider the value of the purchase, and the price they give for it. To mere worldly considerations, to the *praise of men*, or *filthy lucre*, they sacrifice that *integrity*, for the loss of which worlds cannot compensate.

The publisher of these tracts does not conceal his name through the fear of any thing that *men* can *say of him*, or *do to him*, but merely to give what he has written a better chance of being read without prejudice. What he has done is out of a sincere good-will and compassion to the multitude, who believe *they know not what, or why*, and what is of more consequence, who *know not what spirit they are of*; but instead of *speaking the truth in love*, mistake bitterness and rancour for a zeal for God and his truth, and also for the sake of a better sort of people, who are unhappily drawn into the same delusions.

Considering the deference which the common people always pay to the judgment of men of learning, there can be little doubt but that, if those persons who, having studied this subject, have been convinced that Christ is not God, and ought not to be worshipped as God, had openly avowed their opinion, and had had recourse to no mean subterfuge or equivocation, this fundamental article of true and rational christianity had long ago been the prevailing belief; and our religion appearing more worthy of its divine author, there would have been, at this time, fewer unbelievers in all christian countries, and many more converts made to it from other religions. And, compared with this glorious advantage, what has been gained by all the arts and sophistry of ministers, who have concealed their real meaning under ambiguous expressions, lest, as they pretend, they should too much shock the prejudices of their hearers?

That some regard should be paid to the prejudices of the *weak* is allowed; but let not this lead men to criminal dissimulation, or extend to things of so much importance as this, respecting the *unity of God*. In this case, let us keep at the greatest distance from every thing that is *disingenuous*; let the truth be spoken in the most explicit manner, and let the consequences be left to the *power of truth*, and the *God of truth*. Besides, it is impossible that while men retain de-

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praved and unworthy notions of God; their devotion should be such as God requires; so that this pretended tenderness injures those who are the objects of it, as well as bears an unfavourable aspect on the interests of christianity more at large. Such are the effects of the *wisdom of this world*, when it is put in the place of *sincerity*, and a regard to the plain *truth of the gospel* of Jesus Christ!

Professing the purity of the christian faith, let us be careful, my brethren, to adorn it by a blameless and exemplary life. More especially let us beware that we do not wear *the form of godliness*, when our hearts are destitute of the *power* of it; and that we indulge no secret hope, that by any peculiar strictness and austerity of life, by frequent or long prayers, or by attending on much preaching, and using other means of religion, we shall atone for a neglect of *the weightier matters of the law, righteousness, mercy, and truth*. Let the integrity of our hearts appear in the cheerfulness of our countenances; and let us shew that we *love God whom we have not seen*, by loving our brethren *whom we do see*, and by being always ready to do them every kind office in our power.

To judge of our love to God, or of our love to Christ, directly, by what we *feel* when we think of them, especially when we are excluded from the world, as is the custom with many, is to expose ourselves to the grossest and most dangerous delusions. We find in the scriptures a much plainer, and safer method of judging in both these cases. *This*, says the apostle John, *is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. If ye love me, says our Lord, keep my commandments. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you; and this is my commandment, that ye love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.*

Remember that true christian charity is humble, modest, and diffident; and that he is pronounced to be happy, who feareth always, so as to be circumspect in thought, word, and deed; and that, for this purpose, we are to *put on the whole armour of God*, that we may withstand the temptations of the world.

Rather than indulge a Pharisaical pride, in recounting your *experiences*, boasting how vile you have once been, or thought yourselves to be, in order to make others believe how holy and sanctified you are now, content yourselves with the language and practice of the humble publican, who, speaking

speaking to God and his own heart only, cried, *God be merciful to me a sinner.*

Rejoice in all the real good you see done by others, whatever may be their ill will, or opposition to you ; and be especially upon your guard, lest your just aversion to what is corrupt in the principles or practices of others, lead you to dislike what is good in them. Let not the *Pharisaical rigour* of some throw you into the opposite extreme of *levity* ; and let not their laying an undue stress upon praying, preaching, and other means of religion, make you neglect them, as we are too apt to do, with respect to any thing that has been much abused.

Having enough to do with our own hearts, let us be particularly upon our guard against that spirit of *censoriousness*, which many professing christians indulge with too little restraint. Let us remember that the true christian *beareth all things, and hopeth all things* ; and let us never forget the awful warning of our Lord, *Judge not that ye be not judged : for with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged ; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

Be not moved, my brethren, by the rash censures and reprobaches of others. *Persecution*, of some kind, is what *all who live godly in Christ Jesus must expect to suffer in this world.* To their wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice, answer with the wisdom that is from above ; which is pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated ; full of mercy, and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Let us even rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer *shame*, and insult, for the sake of Christ, though our sufferings come not from the professed enemies of Christ, but from *false brethren* ; and let us not be concerned at being counted *deceivers*, if we be conscious to ourselves that we truly love the gospel, and that we labour to promote and adorn it.

You will be called *Arminians* and *Socinians* by your adversaries, or something else that shall express more of their hatred and dislike. But let not this offend you. If there be any proper meaning in those epithets, it can only be that you hold certain opinions which they deem to be false, but which you cherish, as the only genuine doctrines of the gospel. If nothing more is meant by those terms, besides mere *reproach* and *abuse*, think yourselves happy, as being *reproached for the name of Christ.* 1 Peter, iv. 14. With many the appellation of *Lutheran* or *Calvinist* is reproachful, and with

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many also, that of *Christian* is much more so. Besides, both *Arminius* and *Socinus* were men who loved the gospel, and who suffered more for their adherence to it, than most others of the Reformers, especialy *Socinus*.

If we be christians indeed, we shall consider ourselves as *not of this world*, but as *citizens of heaven*. *The friendship of this world*, therefore, together with popularity, and success in it, ought not to be considered as any object for us. *If we abide in Christ, and walk even as he also walked, not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds, we are heirs of a far nobler inheritance, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us; and when Christ, who is our life, and for whom we suffer reproach, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory.*

I shall conclude this address with a word of advice and exhortation to all *unitarians*, whether they be members of the established church, or of any society of *diffenters* in this country.

Of such great importance is the doctrine of the *divine unity*, that nothing will more full justify a separation from any *christian church* that does not openly profess it, and much more from those that avow the contrary doctrine, directing prayers, and paying supreme worship, to any other than the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

It was for the preservation of this great and fundamental doctrine, that *Abraham*, and his family by *Isaac* and *Jacob*, were separated from the rest of the world, and made a distinct people, as it were to be the depositaries of the true religion, which consists principally in the sole worship of the one true and living *God*, the maker and preserver of all things. The same important doctrine was uniformly taught by *Christ* and the *apostles*; though christians in after times, like the *Israelites* after the time of *Joshua*, relapsed into that *idolatry* which has generally prevailed to this day.

If it was a sufficient justification of the first reformers, that they considered the church from which they separated as worshipping saints and angels; will it not justify your separation from their partial reformations, that you consider them as praying to and worshipping one whom you consider as a *man* like yourselves, though honoured and distinguished by *God* above all other men?

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To join habitually in public worship with trinitarians, is countenancing that worship, which you must consider as *idolatrous*; and which, however innocent in them, is highly criminal in you. If they think it a point of conscience not to go to mass in popish churches because, in their opinion, it is idolizing a *piece of bread*, you ought to make a point of conscience of not worshipping with them, because in your opinion, it is idolizing a *man*, who is as much a creature of God as a *piece of bread*, and just as improper an object of worship.

Besides, the great offence to Jews, Mahometans, and the world at large, being the doctrine of the *trinity*, it is highly necessary that societies of christians should be formed expressly on this principle of the *divine unity*, that it may be evident to all the world, that there are christians, and societies of christians, who hold the doctrine of the trinity in as much abhorrence as they themselves can do. For the conversion of Jews or Mahometans to christianity, while it is supposed to contain the doctrine of the trinity, no person who knows, or has heard of Jews or Mahometans, can ever expect.

You will say We unitarians are but few, even in large towns, and still fewer in villages, and there are no men of leisure or learning among us. But was not this the case with the primitive christians, and yet this circumstance was no obstruction to the forming of a christian church in any place. We read of churches in private houses.

Assemble together, therefore, in the name and in the fear of God, and according to the order of the gospel, every Lord's-day, if there be no more than *two or three*, or even a single family of you in a place; read the scriptures, and pray together. Also read sermons, or other works of moral instruction, of which there is, happily, no want at this day. Baptize, and administer the Lord's supper among yourselves; and as you grow more numerous, form yourselves upon some regular plan of church discipline; that it may be the means of uniting and keeping you together; and rigourously exclude all persons whose conduct would be a reproach to you.

As to a *learned ministry*, it is acknowledged to be desirable, where it can be had, but it is by no means necessary. The gravest and most respectable persons among you, and those who have the most leisure, will, in the character of

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elders, select and read proper prayers and discourses, and perform all the offices of christian societies, just as well as the elders in the primitive churches, who had no such helps as you now have ; and miraculous powers were not of long continuance with them.

If you be at present members of the established church, you will find a *reformed liturgy* ready prepared for your use by Mr. Lindsey. But if you should prefer the mode of worship among the Dissenters (but men of sense will not make much account of such distinctions) you may in many authors, especially at the end of Mr. Holland's sermons, find forms of such prayers as you have been used to : or you may apply to dissenting ministers of your acquaintance, who will chearfully give you any assistance in their power.

All these are trifling obstacles to a great design. It requires indeed a proper degree of christian *zeal* ; but the object is worthy of it. The example has been already set in Scotland, where it was least of all to be expected ; and the success has been such as should abundantly encourage similar attempts in this country.

The Baptists and Methodists, not laying much stress upon a learned ministry, flourish greatly, the Independents are now taking the same methods, and with the same success , while the rational dissenters, fancying they would be disgraced by the want of a learned ministry, are dwindling away almost every where.

Whatever inconvenience may arise from mere *novelty*, it is soon over ; and as the Methodists are collecting into bodies in all places, a thing of this kind will excite much less surprize. But what impression ought the censure of the world to make upon those who, as christians, profess to be *above the world*, and to *rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer shame* in the cause of Christ, and to think themselves *happy* if they be reproached on that account. You should imagine that you hear that awful *voice from heaven*, recorded in the book of *Revelation*, ch. xviii. 24. *Come out of her* (i. e. of mystical Babylon, the great source of all the corruptions of christianity) *my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*

Be careful, however, to do this in the spirit of christian charity, which should be extended to all men, but especially

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to all that bear the christian name. Consider them as men who are in an error, which is always involuntary. Endeavour to remove the prejudices they unhappily lie under, but forbear all angry reproaches, all insult, and even ridicule; for religion is a serious thing, and *brotherly love* is the very essence of it. And if this love is to be extended even to *enemies*, much more should it be indulged towards our merely *mistaken friends*.

The author of this address intirely approves of *Mr. Lindsey's Liturgy*, or that which was used at the Octagon Chapel in Liverpool; and he would recommend *responses* especially to Societies formed in this manner, in which it is particularly desirable, that the members, being nearly on a level, should each bear his part in the service. But lest some, from the force of habit, should not be able to reconcile themselves to the use of a liturgy, and object to the scheme on that account, he has drawn up, and published a set of *Forms for all the occasions of unitarian Societies*.

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